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AUTHOR Fouser, Robert J.
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ABSTRACT

A prospective study investigating pragmatic transfer in the learning of Japanese as a third language (L3) is described. The study will test the hypothesis that the learner's perception of linguistic and cultural distance between the first/second languages (L1/L2) and L3 will determine conscious and unconscious decisions about which linguistic and cultural knowledge is transferable in an L3 communicative setting. Three types of data are to be gathered: data from learners of Japanese as L3 in an Australian university, using collection procedures designed to test this hypothesis; anecdotal reports from a diverse sample of L3 learners; and classroom observation of Japanese L3 instruction. Instruments to be used in the first data group include: a multiple-choice questionnaire on attitudes and motivation; a Japanese C-test; a business letter writing task; open- and closed-ended discourse completion tests; an oral recall task of Japanese dialogues, using visual prompts; and classroom observation. Several of these instruments will also be administered to native Japanese speakers for comparative purposes. It is predicted that learners who successfully navigate the complexities of three linguistic and cultural systems will experience gradual emergence of a "third self," and that findings will help explain this process. Contains 22 references. (MSE)

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Creating the Third Self: Pragmatic Transfer in Third Language Acquisition[1]

Robert J. Fouser
Trinity College
Dublin

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents the outline of an extended research project aimed at exploring pragmatic transfer in the acquisition of Japanese as a third language (L3). Far from being restricted to 'good language learners' or the more esoteric corners of academia, L3 learning and acquisition occurs in a wide variety of settings. As more languages and cultures interact, pragmatic aspects of language learning have taken on greater significance because of the decidedly negative results of failure to control interlanguage pragmatics -- pragmalinguistic failure -- are costly to learners (Thomas 1983, Davies 1987). Despite the wide range of L3 learning and the importance of pragmatics in learning another language, L3 acquisition studies have been conducted as an intellectual aside to mainstream SLA research (Ringbom 1985) and interlanguage pragmatics have only recently emerged as a defined sub-field of SLA (Kasper and Dahl 1991, Kasper 1992). The research project outlined here takes much of its inspiration from the challenge of drawing on two areas of SLA research that offer much promise to contribute to mainstream SLA research and theory: L3 acquisition and interlanguage pragmatics.

AIMS

This research project has four major aims. The first is to introduce a sharper definition of L3 acquisition research as an enterprise and to discuss the contributions that this enterprise can make to SLA research and theory, particularly with reference to the study of cross-linguistic

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influence and learning strategies. The second is to explore pragmatic transfer in a new context of L3 acquisition. It is hoped that this will contribute to a greater understanding of how cultural and individual factors act as constraints on pragmatic transfer in languages, such as Japanese, that require the use of a large number of honorific forms and formulaic expressions in everyday communication. The third is to analyse the validity of using data collection methods that were designed for use with SLA research on Western languages, such as the C-test, discourse completion tests (DCT), and introspective methods (think-aloud protocols and retrospective interviews), in researching the acquisition of non-Western languages by non-Western learners (see Robinson 1992 and Rose 1994 for a critical discussion of this issue). It is hoped that this will contribute to the debate on universality in pragmatics by questioning the assumption that data collection methods themselves have universal validity. The fourth is to suggest the pedagogical implications of the research findings for learners and teachers in formal instructional settings and for learners who seek to learn a third language autonomously in a natural setting.

BACKGROUND

Language Transfer and Third Language Acquisition

The term 'language transfer' itself has been the subject of much controversy as some researchers prefer to use 'cross-linguistic influence' as a broader term that includes 'language transfer' as well as other phenomena, such as language attrition and avoidance, that are caused by the influence of one or more languages on the acquisition of an additional language (Sharwood Smith and Kellerman 1986). For the purposes of this research project, 'transfer' will refer to linguistic and cultural knowledge from one language and cultural systems that learners utilize consciously and unconsciously in acquiring and communicating successfully in an additional language.

Before outlining the research design of the present study, however, it is necessary to define 'third language' (L3) in this research. L1 refers to the native language, and L2 to a language learned or acquired after the acquisition of the L1, the latter being the principal concern of SLA research. This leads logically to defining L3 as the learning or

acquisition of an additional language beyond the L2. To avoid possible confusion, LN will be used to refer to either the L1 or the L2 in discussing the L3; this contrasts with Ringbom's (1985) usage of LN to refer to languages other than the L1 and the target L3. Important variables that must be considered in defining the context of L3 acquisition research are: 'linguistic variables' such as the level of L2 proficiency when learning the L3; 'affective variables' such as attitudes and motivation; and 'cognitive variables' such as the age of learners when they acquired the L2 and are learning the L3 and overall language aptitude and intelligence. Furthermore, a distinction needs to be made between learners in a bilingual environment who are learning an L3 and learners in a monolingual environment who are learning an L3 as a second foreign language. It is expected that learners in a bilingual or multilingual environment will, in most cases, have higher L2 proficiency and more experience in applying learning and communication strategies to the task of learning another language than learners in a monolingual environment. 'Multilingual' and 'trilingual' will refer to the state in which more than two languages are used simultaneously, or to an individual who has acquired more than two languages.

Most L3 acquisition studies have found that transfer into L3 occurs from the language that is typologically closest to the L3. Research on Asian and African learners with an Indo-European L2 who are learning a closely related L3 has shown that the L2 is the predominant source of transfer (Bentahila 1975, Ahukanna, Lund, and Gentile 1979, Singh and Carroll 1979, Khaldi 1981, Ringbom 1985). Likewise, L3 learners whose L1 and L2 are both Indo-European also transfer from the language that is closest to the target L3 (Singleton and Little 1984, Singleton 1987). No L3 acquisition studies have been conducted on three languages that belong to three different language families, or on the acquisition of a non-Western L3. There is a considerable divergence of opinion about the role of L1 and L2 in L3 acquisition. Vildomec (1963), Ahukanna, Lund, and Gentile (1979), and Singh Carroll (1979) all conclude that L3 acquisition suffers from undue negative interference from L1, L2, or both, whereas, Khaldi (1981), Singleton and Little (1984), Ringbom (1985), and Singleton (1987) emphasize the facilitative effects of L1 and L2 knowledge, particularly if the learner

perceives either the L1 or L2 (or both) to be closely related to the L3. This second line of research expands on the Kellerman (e.g. Kellerman 1983) hypothesis that posits perceived language distance between L1 and L2 as a major constraint on transfer along with 'markedness'. Researchers also disagree on which areas of language are more susceptible to transfer: Ringbom and his group of researchers at the Åbo Akademi in Finland (Ringbom 1985) have concluded that transfer from L2 into L3 occurs mainly in comprehension and in lexical selection; Singleton (1987) noted a large amount of lexical transfer from Spanish into L3 French in a case study of an Anglophone learner's oral production in French; Vildomec (1963), Bentahila (1975), Singh and Carroll (1979) have all noted phonological transfer from L2 into L3; Bentahila (1975), and Ahukanna, Lund, and Gentile (1979) and Khaldi (1981) have observed syntactic transfer from L2 into L3. In a study of learners with no previous exposure to the target language, Dutch in this case, Singleton and Little (1984) concluded that learners who had some knowledge of German scored higher on a test of Dutch oral and written comprehension than those who had no knowledge of German.

Pragmatics and Politeness

'Pragmatics' is a global term that deals with linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of meaning from the viewpoint of language use. Within pragmatics, politeness phenomena were chosen as the focus of investigation because they often influence the success or failure of learner attempts to communicate in another language (Thomas 1983, Davies 1987). 'Politeness' in this research refers to Fraser's (1990) definition of politeness as a 'conversational contract' among participants to adhere to the expected rules of the particular conversation or communicative setting. Investigating politeness phenomena in Japanese is of particular importance because of the large number of honorific forms and formulaic expressions, and because of the vital role that such expressions play in Japanese communication (Matsumoto 1989). Thus, by meshing L3 acquisition with pragmatic transfer, this research project will explore how learners of an L3 utilize their already existing linguistic and cultural knowledge in the production and comprehension of politeness speech acts in Japanese as an L3.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Hypothesis

Given the aims of this research, the following hypothesis will be investigated. This initial hypothesis, inspired by Khaldi (1981), Kellerman (1983), Singleton and Little (1984), Ringbom (1985), and Singleton (1987), holds that the learners' perception of language and culture distance between L1/L2 and the target L3 determine their conscious and unconscious decisions on which linguistic and cultural knowledge is transferable in an L3 communicative setting. This hypothesis is based in part on the premise that learning is cognitive problem solving through the creative application of existing knowledge and information processing strategies. This hypothesis gains further support from the premise that language and culture are inseparable from one another in SLA (Janicki 1985, Davies 1987, Kramsch 1993). This initial hypothesis can thus be expanded to predict that learners of an L3 will utilize their entire range of linguistic and cultural knowledge to develop and later test hypotheses about the L3, but that the complexity of this task and the large amount of knowledge in question will lead learners to develop a strategy of utilizing knowledge from the language(s) and culture(s) that they perceive to be closest to the L3, and thus increase their potential to communicate successfully in the L3.

Learners

Three types of data will be collected to investigate this hypothesis: first, two rounds of empirical data from learners of Japanese as an L3 will be obtained from data collection procedures designed specifically to test the above hypothesis; second, experiential reports on L3 acquisition by persons selected by the researcher who represent a diverse sampling of L3 learners; third, classroom observations of Japanese being taught as an L3, which will provide the groundwork for discussing the pedagogical implications of this research. The two rounds of empirical data combined with classroom observations will take place in different learning environments to increase the generalizibility of the findings from a relatively small number of learners. The experiential reports will be collected by the researcher concurrent with the other data collection procedures.

The first round of empirical data collection will take place with intermediate learners of Japanese as an L3 at the Language Centre at the University of Sydney. Learners will be chosen from a combination of several L1 and L2 backgrounds in order to enhance comparability of the findings. Considering the demographics of Sydney, it is expected that most learners will have an L1/L2 combination of English and an Asian language such as Chinese or Korean. L2 proficiency, which should be higher than Japanese proficiency according to the research design, will be controlled as an important linguistic variable in L3 acquisition by reference to learner performance in L2 language courses and proficiency tests if need be. Affective variables such as attitudes and motivation will be controlled by reference to a learner-completed questionnaire. Further variables such as age and overall academic attainment will also be considered.

Intermediate learners of Japanese were chosen because they stand between two extremes: *ab initio* learners, who may not be familiar with honorific and formulaic expressions, and advanced learners, who have more metalinguistic and metacultural knowledge that may make pragmatic transfer more difficult to verify by the research methods that are used in this research project.

Instruments

The following data collection instruments, all of which will include think-aloud procedures followed by retrospective interviews, will be used in the empirical section: 1) a multiple choice questionnaire on attitudes and motivation; 2) a Japanese C-test; 3) a Japanese business letter writing task; 4) open-ended and close-ended discourse completion tests (DCT) in Japanese; 5) an oral recall task, using visual prompts, of various Japanese speech act dialogues; (6) classroom observation of learners who participate in this study and of other learners (see Raabe (1986) for the only study of an L3 classroom). In addition, native speakers of Japanese will be asked to complete the C-test, the business letter writing task, and the DCT's in order to check the validity of the instruments and to compare the learners' responses with native speakers using the same instruments.

Procedure

Learners will be asked to think-aloud in whichever language is comfortable for them as they complete all of the tasks except the attitudes and motivation questionnaire. The researcher will instruct the learners on how to use think-aloud protocols before the beginning of the first session. Each session will be conducted individually, or in pairs, with the researcher. Each session will be videotaped to provide a visual and oral prompt in the retrospective interviews that are to follow; these interviews will be conducted in English or in a language known by the researcher and will be audiotaped for future reference. Much controversy has surrounded the use of introspective methods in research in psychology and linguistics. Given the emphasis on the individual's creativity in learning and on the importance of individual perceptions about language and learning in this research, introspective methods offer invaluable insight into the processes and thoughts of learners, which more than compensates for doubts about the accuracy of data obtained through such methods (see Færch and Kasper (eds) (1987) for a thorough analysis of introspective methods and Kasper Dahl (1991) for a review of research methods in interlanguage pragmatics). Furthermore, the introspective data will be used together with linguistic product data from learners and from native speakers, classroom observations, and experiential reports.

Special Considerations with Japanese

The C-test, which has proven to be a valid indicator of learner proficiency in Western languages, needs to be tied to more objective levels of difficulty because no studies have as yet used the C-test with Japanese. Every effort will be made to select passages that correspond to the intermediate level of difficulty on the Japanese Language Proficiency Test, which is given yearly by the Japan Foundation and which is recognized as an objective measurement of Japanese proficiency by Japanese universities. The development of data collection methods is further complicated by the issue of complexity of Japanese orthography in which two syllabary systems of 51 characters each, *hiragana* and *katakana*, are used with roughly 2000 Chinese characters. Given that the focus of this research is on Japanese interlanguage pragmatics and that think-aloud protocols will be used extensively, every effort will be made to prevent the complex

orthographic system from interfering with data collection procedures without unduly altering the integrity of the language in the instruments.

CONCLUSION

Third language learners who successfully navigate the complexities of three linguistic and cultural systems will witness the slow emergence of a 'third self ' that offers the potential for greater participation in the diversity of human life. It is hoped that the questions raised and explored in this research project will help to explain how this third self comes into being.

NOTES

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